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ABSTRACT

This document applies an anthropological framework to the explanation of group relations in an attempt to implement a community school. In a West Philadelphia area, black community groups joined to establish an alternative school, but tensions and conflicts developed over pedagogical practices. According to the anthropological framework, decisions about the pedagogical practices were not made on the basis of educational theory and practice, but on boundary maintenance considerations in the community board's assertion of control over the school, and on entrepreneurial activity in the board's effort to reduce negotiable issues with other groups. (RA)

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CONSEQUENCES OF IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS: TOWARD A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INVESTIGATING PROBLEMS

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I. Introduction

Educational change may come about in a variety of ways: through new theories and discoveries in the psychology of learning and child development, through the impact of technology on educational and other institutions in society, and through the dissatisfaction of those who are served by educational systems and institutions. Increasingly, change in schools has been the result of conflict between the clients of the system and those who manage the system. The demand for choice in the education of one's children and for a part in the decision-making process that affects and determines what education shall be in any one community have been the impetus behind the movement for community control of education. This movement, moreover, has taken place in the larger context of a demand for greater individual control over traditional centers of power and for a breaking down of bureaucratic and impersonal institutions.

Traditionally, research in education has taken place within a psychological framework and, more recently, within a sociological framework. While these have proved useful for certain kinds of explanation, we believe that an anthropological model is better suited for the analysis and explanation of educational changes the sources of which lie in the dissatisfaction within groups and the conflict between groups. We propose in this paper, therefore, to outline some anthropological concepts which have been used elsewhere in the explanation of social change and group interaction, and to demonstrate their applicability to a case of educational innovation.

The scene of one such innovation was West Philadelphia in the spring and summer of 1969. A group of black parents and black community leaders approached the University of Pennsylvania for help in solving the problem

of overcrowding at West Philadelphia High School. Implicit in their demands was also the desire for a new kind of education to stem their children's failure to master basic skills and their growing lack of interest in school and to improve their low scores on college entrance and other standardized exams.

The community's first demand was that the University provide facilities and space to accommodate 1000 students from West Philadelphia High School. The University was also under pressure at that time from the community as a whole to help alleviate the housing problem caused in part by the large scale building program the University had undertaken. The problem is not a new one. The traditional role of the university has been one of research and the training of scholars and professionals. To that end institutions of higher learning throughout the country have been expanding their facilities at a rapid rate to meet the increased demand for higher education. In urban areas, this means expansion into the residential community, tearing down homes and other facilities to provide for the university community. Residents thus see the traditional goals of the university in conflict with their own. Their complaint is that the urban university has not applied its expertise, facilities and financial resources in any substantial way to alleviating the critical problems of the city.

In the light of these community pressures, the University entered into an agreement with these community residents and the Board of Education to establish a new educational program for the high school students of West Philadelphia. They appointed Dr. Aase Eriksen of the Graduate School of Education consultant to the project and charged her with the task of designing a program to meet the needs and desires of the community. The

result was the establishment of the West Philadelphia Community Free School, a non-graded, experimental school based on the notions of freedom, responsibility in learning, individualized instruction, and community participation in the educational process.

The initial community group (later the Community Board of Directors of the West Philadelphia Community Free School) assumed the responsibility for policy making and implementation of the educational program; the university and board of education undertook to provide facilities, financial support, and necessary personnel although decision making in these areas was the responsibility of the Community Board. The first unit of the West Philadelphia Community Free School began operation on February 2, 1970, and is still in operation, now with three units.

Seemingly, the conflict between community and the educational power structure had been resolved. The new educational program was established, funds were allotted, and a variety of community interests made a real input and were served by the new school. Undoubtedly, there were further problems of a strategic and tactical nature: zoning and building regulations had to be met; materials and equipment were delayed in shipment; renovation work took longer than anticipated. Nevertheless, these problems were worked out in a group, albeit, representing diverse interests, but ostensibly working toward the same goal. Later events demonstrated, however, that there are tensions and contradictions inherent in this joining of interests, indeed in the implementation of any alternative school, regardless of the fact that the intended goal serves all the participants.

II. Conceptual Framework

This paper is an attempt to analyze and explain two of these inherent tensions and their consequences for the implementation of an alternative school. It is based on data collected during two years of field work in the Community Free School. Data used for this paper have come from the field notes of teachers and staff members, interviews with teachers, and minutes and field notes of Community Board meetings.

In our analysis we have taken a wholistic view of group behavior; that is, the Community Board is seen as acting as a collective body constituted to perform certain functions and to represent the larger community. We have, therefore, focused on the already established group -- its operation and development -- rather than on the individual interaction which takes place in group formation.

Preliminary analysis suggests, furthermore, that Frederik Barth's and Harald Eidheim's work in Scandinavian societies is applicable to the explanation of the consequences of implementing alternative schools where that implementation involves the participation of two or more distinct groups. We believe that the concepts developed in the Scandinavian studies have explanatory power for a whole series of phenomena that are manifested in such implementation.

The Barth and Eidheim concepts are three: boundaries, entrepreneurship, and the notion of the importance of the event:

1) Boundaries may be conceived of as points at which and means by which group identity is defined. (Barth, 1969). The existence of boundaries may be implicit and covert in the everyday interaction among group members. They may become "exaggerated," however, in the presence of non-

group members and in interaction with other groups. In applying this concept to the implementation of the Community Free School, we may note the existence of two distinct groups (though there were others) for the purpose of this analysis: the black community residents who were members of the Community Board; and the white implementers and teaching staff of the school. We believe that in the case of the Community Board, the need to maintain boundaries, and thus identity (particularly in the face of the dominant white culture) was a more primary need than pedagogical innovations, which took on secondary importance.

Eidheim conceives of these boundaries (where Lapps are the minority and Norwegians the majority) as forming three distinct spheres in which interaction is organized: "(1) a public sphere, (2) a Lappish sphere closed sphere, and (3) a Norwegian closed sphere. Each of these is associated with characteristic codes, themes, and valuations, and further distinguished by the ethnic composition of the acting personnel. The spheres in their generalized forms emerge as an organizational result of ethnic heritage in this particular dual context. Situationally, however, behavior belonging in one or another of these spheres is dependent on definable circumstances or opportunity situations." (Eidheim, 1969). For present purposes, we will devote our discussion only to the sphere of public interaction, and it is our thesis that the limits of this sphere underwent definite change in the course of the Community Free School implementation.

2) The role of the entrepreneur (or more accurately, the entrepreneurial aspects of a role) is defined by Barth as displaying the following characteristics in contrast with more traditional roles which tend to

maintain the status quo: a) its "more single-minded concentration on the maximization of one type of value," b) "the more experimental and speculative, less institutionalized character of [his] activity," and c) his "greater willingness to take risks." (Barth, 1963). The individual entrepreneur is essentially a marginal man: he perceives his own culture on its own terms as well as from the point of view of the outsider. However, since we are dealing here with group rather than individual interaction and analysis, it is more fruitful to think of the entrepreneurial role as being a collective one. In effect, we have here two collective entrepreneurs: the Community Board and the implementers and teaching staff of the school. Though each group possesses and manifests the characteristics of the entrepreneurial role, we believe that the aim of entrepreneurial activity differed for the two groups. While the implementers and teaching staff (18 of 20 were white) saw the entrepreneurial aspects of their role as involving the implementation of pedagogical innovations, we believe that community participants perceived their entrepreneurship in terms of the implementation of a school over which they had control.

3) Barth further cites the need to describe change as a process, to describe the events of change rather than two distant points in time which demonstrate simply that change has occurred. New relationships which develop as a result of changes in attitudes and behavior are observable as concrete events, according to Barth, and thus may be at the source of larger changes. (Barth, 1967). It is important to recognize that the notion of the importance of events is both a theoretical conceptualization and a methodological tool. To document and describe change or the lack of change, one must develop a chronological series of events where change

could have occurred and demonstrate whether or not it did. In other words, each event has the potential for alternative courses of action; the choice of action will either be supportive of change, hostile to change, or in some cases, a combination of both. As a conceptual tool, events have explanatory power in that the choice of alternatives at one stage may have definite implications for choices made at later stages or for the alternatives possible at later stages. Thus, for instance, each decision made by the Community Board can be described in terms of its potential for supporting change and/or for supporting different kinds of change.

Within this conceptual and methodological framework, we have analyzed two sources of tension in the implementation of the Community Free School and have followed their development in the events that took place in the school and in the actions of the Community Board. These two events involve the pedagogical notion of "free time" and the desire of teachers to be represented on the Community Board.

III. Events

Event A: The pedagogical model established for each student a period of time of at least one hour a day during which he is able to do anything he likes: study, talk with friends, go outside the school, in short, relax and be on his own. The inclusion of free time in each student's day is based on the premise that students, like most other human beings, need personal time during the school day when they are responsible for their own activities, and that only by giving the student this opportunity will he indeed assume responsibility for himself and his actions.

Traditionally, a school day is completely rostered, i.e., the student has either classes, lunch period, or time to get from one class to another, but no time that is unaccounted for. In terms of traditional educational models, therefore, free time is an innovative concept. Free time was initially supported by both entrepreneurial groups involved in the implementation of the Community Free School, staff as well as the Community Board. Only when the implementation of free time into the program became problematic for the larger black community, was it evident that each group's basis for entrepreneurial activity was different. Moreover, the analysis of the events that took place in the implementation of free time have permitted us to see that boundary lines were being made explicit.

March, 1970: Problems first arose when, two months after the opening of the school, it became apparent that students were using their free time for seemingly aimless activity: for hanging around, playing cards, making noise, and bothering local merchants. Few, if any, were using their time for what would generally be considered productive, educationally or otherwise. The problem in this area also led to a problem of cutting classes: students tended to extend their free time periods into their class periods, either arriving late for classes or not attending classes at all. At this point, Community Board members still supported the notion of free time as is shown by their attempt to deal with the cutting problem. Board members spoke to the students who were cutting and their parents in an attempt to impress upon them the importance of their (the students') personal responsibility for making the school work.

April, 1970: Despite the Board's efforts to deal with cutting, free time remained a problem. Some board members were in favor of eliminating free time periods for students and, in general, of "tightening up" the discipline of the school. What seemed to bother them most was the fact that students, by their aimless activity, were creating and reinforcing prejudicial notions of blacks held by whites. These views were representative of the larger black community which had begun to apply pressure for greater discipline in the school.

When the problem came up for decision again in April, the Board had three alternatives: 1) to eliminate free time, 2) to allow the existing situation to continue, or 3) to redefine and/or restructure free time so as to make it an activity which they could perceive as educational and still adhere to the goals of the model, i.e., the development of personal responsibility. They were persuaded by the educational consultant and the chairman of the Board to support a restructuring of free time in an attempt to make it feasible. The chairman emphatically stated her support: "I think in some of these cases [free time activities] we're definitely getting away from the traditional hangups of the school system. I can understand that it's hard for you because this is the way you've been programmed and forced to operate. We're trying to find new ways; we're trying to turn kids on to something different. Other students might be a good influence on students' misbehaving. This [free time] should be permitted."

In April, the teaching staff and the educational consultant devised means whereby free time could be structured, but still retain its emphasis on personal choice for the student. A recreation room with facilities for

a variety of activities and staffed by personnel to guide students was set up. This program operated successfully for two days, and concept of free time seemed vindicated. Unfortunately, though, there was insufficient personnel to staff the recreation room at all times during the day, and teachers found it an increasing burden to conduct classes, plan lessons, and also staff the recreation room.

May, 1970: Teachers then asked the Community Board for their help either in finding volunteers, such as parents, to work in the school or for board members to work in the recreation room themselves. Because it had been demonstrated that free time was feasible under certain conditions, the Community Board no longer had the option of eliminating it. Their alternatives were three: 1) to help in the recreation room themselves, 2) to find people who would help, or 3) to allow the existing situation to continue, that is, a lack of sufficient staff to work with the free time program. What the Board did, in fact, was to opt for the third alternative; in essence, they ignored the issue and made no decision despite their previous support. While they realized that free time periods could work and did agree to seek help from parents and other community members, the Community Board never actively sought this help. In the field notes of this period teachers noted their concern with the lack of leadership in solving this problem.

September-October, 1970: When school resumed in the fall, the problem remained. Students were still given free time, but no place to use it and no activities or guidance provided for its use. Merchants complained that students were loitering in their stores, and some students spent their free time disrupting classes and other units of the school.

Still, no concrete action was taken by the Board.

December, 1970: At this point, community pressures forced the Community Board to eliminate free time from the program. The problem having been ignored, it reached the point where more fundamental issues were made explicit. To wit, when the Board was confronted with the need to make pedagogical decisions, they did not perceive such decisions as a part of their role. By taking no action, they hoped the problem might go away. But when it could no longer be ignored, the Community Board chose to eliminate it -- its elimination being necessary, they believed, to the ongoing operation of the school -- their primary concern and the aim of their entrepreneurial activity. Board members gave as their reasons black children's need for tradition and order. Three months later, in March 1971, the chairman again explained to teachers the Board's decision to eliminate free time: "There were kids running around like wild people....We said we'd structure free time, and maybe at this time we've reached a point where we can have a guidance period, structure it properly, or else that part of the model we will definitely alter. It was the decision of the Board to do exactly what was done." This was in contrast to her statement made in March, 1970, and emphasized the Board's primacy in making decisions which insure the ongoing operation of the school.

Event B: The elimination of free time also made explicit another major source of tension in the implementation of the Community Free School, a tension which, we believe, can be explained in terms of group boundaries. The education model envisioned the school and all participants

in it as a "community," each member having a stake in its success and a say in its operation. When teachers began to feel, however, that they did not have a say in the running of the school, they requested voting representation on the Community Board.

March, 1970: In the beginning, there was indeed a sense of community and common purpose. Teachers' field notes from this period indicate their personal commitment to the project's success and their gratification at being able to work with the black community on an equal basis. Moreover, in the beginning there was relatively frequent interaction among teachers and the Community Board: Board members observed the operation of the school, talked with teachers informally, and met with them on a formal basis to choose new staff members.

May, 1970: Later, however, when certain elements of the implementation became problematic, such as the question of free time, teachers sensed a growing distance between themselves and the Board. They wanted the Board to take effective action to solve this problem, and sensed a lack of leadership from the Community Board. When the Board failed to act to help them solve the free time issue, teachers questioned the role of the Board in relation to themselves and in relation to the operation of the school. When Board members became less and less visible in the daily operation of the school, teachers felt they were not being taken seriously by the black community and that the Board's interest was of a kind and degree different from their own commitment.

September, 1970: At this point, when the problems of the previous spring had still not been dealt with, teachers reiterated in their field notes their uncertainty about the commitment of the Community Board and

their own relationship to the Community Board. They felt that the teachers' and Community Board's philosophies of the school were different, that the Board was not "with them." They were not certain as to how available the Board would be as a resource for teachers or as to the Board's expectations of teachers. One teacher felt insecurity on the part of the Board regarding drastic educational changes and experimental methods and goals.

October, 1970: The teachers presented a petition to the Community Board asking for representation on the Board by teachers, students, and parents. The Board denied this request claiming that the control of the school was theirs and that the relationship between them and the teachers was a traditional one of management and labor, i.e., the teachers worked for the community and were thus subject to decisions made by the Community Board alone. The chairman later stated that the Board would not change its decision, that Board members felt the teachers were interested in developing their own school "not our school. We don't want your thing really."

IV. Interpretation

The traditional explanation of management vs. labor is, we believe, only a surface explanation of more fundamental differences. As noted above, the Community Board perceived the object of its own entrepreneurial activity as the operation of a school which they could control. Control of the school was, furthermore, a manifestation of minority group identity and of internal group integrity in spite of the influence of a dominant, white culture. Teachers' requests for representation and for help from

the Community Board were perceived by this Board as boundary threats, as the teachers' not the community's interpretation of the Board's role and duties. They saw a reversion to the traditional majority role of defining the minority. The issue of free time itself can be seen as threatening: the support of free time by teachers seemed to the Community Board to be casting blacks back into stereotypical roles of playing cards and hanging around.

The Community Board dealt with this threat to identity by the only means possible: the reassertion of boundaries and the narrowing of public space. Thus, they refused the teachers representation on the Board. This decision, which came at the end of the series of events described above, effectively restricted the area of public space between the two groups, the area where cooperation and compromise were possible.

The fundamental nature of this issue in the implementation of alternative schools becomes even more striking when one compares the interaction (public space) between teachers and Community Board in the spring of 1970 with the interaction that took place the following fall. In the beginning of the school's operation, the strategic and tactical issues of acquiring facilities, equipment, and materials made the operation of the school the primary concern of all participants -- thus supporting the Community Board's notion of its own entrepreneurial activity. The public space here was relatively wide providing an area where the two groups, in effect, agreed not to disagree. Moreover, the occasions of cooperative interaction between the Board and teachers were not perceived as threats; teachers assumed they had a say in decision making but did not test this power because there was no need to do so until differences

were clearly apparent. Only when differences became evident and explicit could definitions of roles and boundaries actually surface above the assumed bases of interaction. Confrontation was, in fact, inevitable not only because boundaries needed to be reasserted but also because the single-minded nature of the entrepreneurial role restricted the amount of compromise possible. The Community Board not only denied the teachers access to those areas which defined community identity, but also denied the teachers their pedagogical expertise stating that the black community would have to instruct teachers as to the methods of teaching in such a school and of dealing with black students.

V. Summary

The issues and concepts above have been described in order to demonstrate that the anthropological notions of boundaries and entrepreneurship (and the relationship between them) may be used for the analysis and explanation of the consequences of emerging alternative schools. This paper has been an attempt to demonstrate the applicability of these concepts to educational change, but their incorporation into a theoretical model must wait for further analysis of empirical data. Hopefully, such a model can make a contribution to both anthropology and education by elaborating the notions of boundaries and institutional change and by explaining phenomena which occur in the context of educational institutions. We hope to show in the continuation of this study, by a detailed content analysis, the events that culminated in the assertion of boundaries and the consequences for group interaction in educational change.

Two major implications are, however, already evident. First, while

dissatisfaction may be the impetus for the creation of alternative schools, it may be questioned whether this dissatisfaction has to do with education alone or even with education itself. The motivations of participants in the implementation of alternative schools influence their roles, their perceptions, and their actions in the operation of such a school. There is evidence that other alternative schools have experienced similar problems in the transformation of deep-structure aims to the surface and everyday operation of the school. Paul Lauter has described his experience in the Adams-Morgan Community School Project in Washington, D. C.:

> People with very disparate views and interests agreed to certain words on a page without revealing, or perhaps recognizing, that they assigned various meanings to the words. The general feeling seemed to be 'Let's get started, and we'll find out just what we're doing as we go along.' The submerged differences and the haste were rooted in the history of the project and the structure of the neighborhood, but, I would suggest, the history of Adams-Morgan is indicative of the currents in urban education generally. (Lauter, 1968, p. 237).

Secondly, while it has been claimed that the major reasons for the failures of many alternative schools have been their lack of structure, their lack of educational goals, and the lack of consensus, (Holt, 1972), it may also be argued, as we have done, that the inevitable consequences of group interaction may influence the outcome of educational experiments.

Our preliminary analysis of the Community Free School data points to the above conclusions and implications. Equally important, it points to new ways of approaching the consequences of alternative schools. Hopefully, continued research using these approaches will prove valuable to the implementation and success of such schools.

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